



TESTIMONY TO THE LABOR COMMITTEE

February 27, 2014

H.B. No 5279 (RAISED) AN ACT ELIMINATING THE MINIMUM FAIR WAGE EXCEPTION FOR CERTAIN CITIZENS OF CONNECTICUT

To the Members of the Labor Committee:

To paraphrase a famous quote from many election campaigns -"It's all about the economy...."and for us, it's all about jobs.

My name is Pat Bourne and I am the Executive Director of SARAH, Inc. We are a family founded, non-profit agency that provides work and life skills training and other community based supports and services for over 500 children and adults with intellectual and other disabilities throughout southern and eastern Connecticut. Our mission is to enhance skills and enrich lives. We believe in the right to employment for all who want to work and we believe in equal pay for equal work.

Do you know that as a service provider, SARAH, Inc. supports over 120 workers in retail, manufacturing and service jobs throughout the community? Dozens of businesses rely on SARAH supported workers every day.

Who are these supported workers and what does equal pay for equal work mean? Let me tell you about just two. Stacy is a young woman who is a member of a SARAH supported work crew at a local manufacturing plant. She works every day and has worked there for many years. She is responsible for folding, counting, and assembling the many items that are shipped from the company's warehouse. She commutes to work, but she travels together with the rest of her crew in a van provided by SARAH that is driven by a job coach. She is a hard worker performing productive and satisfying work and she has an intellectual disability. She is paid minimum wage based on her skills and ability. Her paycheck is a source of pride, respect and dignity.

Ann Marie is a young woman who is also supported by SARAH. Ann Marie has cerebral palsy. She uses a walker and has very limited mobility and use of her hands. She tires easily. The pace and schedule of her day is determined by her health and other factors. Ann Marie, too, works every day when she is able. She packages materials for a local manufacturer. She "telecommutes". Her job coach helps Ann Marie open boxes, sort materials and uses "hand over hand" assistance to help her package the materials. Anne Marie is a hard worker performing productive and satisfying work and she has an intellectual disability. Ann Marie is paid less than minimum wage based on her skills, abilities and production rate compared to a "typical" employee. Her paycheck is a source of pride, respect and dignity.

The law that created the sub-minimum wage provision was enacted over 70 years ago. To our credit as a country and as a state much has changed in our attitudes and perceptions about people with intellectual disabilities during that time. Unfortunately, much has remained the same.

Current statistics show that 70 -80% of people with disabilities are unemployed and that number increases to over 90% for people with intellectual disabilities. I am sure you are hearing from many people with many different opinions on this subject. It is a complex and multilayered issue. We ask you to first consider the unintended but very real consequences of this proposed bill. How will this bill ensure that Ann Marie and others like her who are currently employed will not lose their jobs? How will this bill promote employment for all who want to work?

Before you close the door on this option, there must be a comprehensive strategy to ensure there are the supports, funding and systems in place to promote employment and to protect the rights of all people with differing abilities who want to work. We welcome the opportunity to work with the committee to achieve this common goal.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Patricia Bourne, Executive Director
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